DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 226 RC 023 371

AUTHOR	Bushway, Deborah, Comp.
TITLE	The Vitality of Latino Communities in Rural Minnesota = La vitalidad de las comunidades latinas en Minnesota rural.
INSTITUTION	Minnesota State Univ., Mankato. Center for Rural Policy and Development.
PUB DATE	2001-12-00
NOTE	49p.; Executive summary in English and Spanish.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.mankato.msus.edu/dept/ruralmn/.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
LANGUAGE	English, Spanish
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Bilingualism; *Community Attitudes; Community Development; Community Relations; Continuing Education; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Pluralism; *Culture Conflict; Dropouts; *Educational Needs; Focus Groups; *Hispanic Americans; *Immigrants; Limited English Speaking; Police; Racial Discrimination; *Rural Areas; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Latinos; Minnesota

ABSTRACT

In response to the growing Latino population, a project examined barriers and supports for community development for Latinos in seven rural Minnesota communities. In each community, bilingual facilitators conducted two Latino and one non-Latino focus groups. Findings revealed much strength in these communities. Residents appreciated the economic and multicultural contributions of the Latino community. Cultural diversity task forces, Latino organizations, and other initiatives were emerging in some communities. Multicultural libraries were under construction in two communities. Among the barriers identified, the most alarming was the high number of high school dropouts among Latinos. This issue must be addressed or a significant percentage of the future workforce will be unprepared. Continuing education among adult Latinos was also of great concern, as it was seen as a primary way to advance in the workforce and create Latino leaders. Language was another key barrier. Bilingual community education is needed--the lack of interpreters inhibits the ability of Latinos to interact with key community institutions such as health care, law enforcement, and government agencies. Tension between Latinos and law enforcement was noted, indicating a need for bilingual and bicultural police officers and for cultural competency training. Communities should integrate Latino members into local community leadership positions. This will decrease "insider/outsider" perspectives and reduce cultural tension. The creation of Latino-specific support groups should also be supported. Appendices describe the communities and participants. (Contains 12 references.) (TD)

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THE VITALITY OF LATINO COMMUNITIES IN RURAL MINNESOTA

Deborah Bushway, Ph.D.
Metropolitan State University &
Hispanic Advocacy and Community
Empowerment through Research (HACER)

Seeking Solutions for Greater Minnesota's Future

RC 023371

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The Vitality of Latino Communities in Rural Minnesota

La vitalidad de las comunidades latinas en Minnesota rural

December 2001

Compiled by:
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Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organizations played a variety of key roles in the creation of this report. Consequently, we would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their efforts.

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Executive Summary

Throughout the country many have been taken by surprise by the new Census numbers indicating a high rate of growth in the Latino population. In some rural Minnesota communities, the Latino population now accounts for approximately one quarter of the community's residents. Overall in Minnesota, the Latino population is estimated to account for at least 3 percent of the total population. Since the early diversification of these rural communities, there have been questions and struggles as these towns have sought to adjust to their changing demographics. This project seeks to identify and measure specific barriers and supports for community development for Latinos in Greater Minnesota.

Community development was examined in seven Greater Minnesota communities with terms relevant to the Latino perspective. The seven rural communities selected for this study are Willmar, Worthington, Albert Lea, Owatonna, St. James, Pelican Rapids and Long Prairie.

This study revealed much strength in these seven communities. Latinos bring a significant workforce, and business owners and other town leaders (city council members, school board members, etc.) understand the economic contributions of the Latino community. Residents express appreciation for the multiculturalism brought to town under the influence of the Latino culture. Educators and community leaders noted that the exposure to cultural and language differences gave children and families a more "realistic" view of the world.

Some communities have developed cultural diversity task forces and other initiatives to respond to the increasing diversity in these towns. Multicultural libraries are under construction in two of the communities, and people appear to be excited about these efforts. Latino organizations are emerging in some of the communities. These organizations hope to serve the entire community by offering a bridge and a path for career development for Latinos.

There is ongoing concern, however, about how the greater community views their relationship to the Latino community. Rochin & de la Torre (1991) suggest that this is critical in successful community development. Does the community view the problems of the Latinos as problems of the community?

The findings of this project would suggest that communities consider the following action steps in their ongoing process of development:

Education

- One of the most alarming findings of the study was the consistently high number of high school dropouts reported among young Latinos and Latinas. Many focus group participants cited this as the most salient issue.

Such failure rates should be viewed as unacceptable. Education and community leaders, along with parents must come together to address this critical issue, or face the reality that a significant percentage of their community's future workforce will be unprepared to succeed in a growing knowledge-based economy.

- Continuing education among the adult Latino population was also an issue of great concern, as it was seen as a primary way to advance in the workforce and create a generation of Latino leaders.

Language

- Few barriers cited by participants were greater or more fundamental than the language barrier. The need for bilingual community education cannot be underestimated. The lack of qualified interpreter services inhibits the ability of Latinos to adequately interact with key community institutions, such as hospital and health care clinics, law enforcement, the judicial system and government agencies.

  Title VI of the Civil Rights act of 1964 requires that all programs receiving federal assistance provide appropriate interpretive services and translation of written materials for clients with limited English proficiency. While it is unrealistic to ask all rural hospitals, clinics, and other community institutions to maintain full time interpreters, innovative solutions, including the use of statewide telecommunication alternatives should be explored.

Law enforcement

- Tensions and distrust between the Latino community and local law enforcement officials should not be underestimated. This tension results from incidents ranging from simple misunderstandings about local regulations to racial profiling and outright harassment. Local law enforcement officials interviewed often noted the need for greater bilingual and bicultural police officers. Hiring such officers would be a good start, along with improving the cultural competency of existing officers.

- A key source of this tension is the issue and debate surrounding access to drivers' licenses among Latinos regardless of their legal status. This issue needs to be productively addressed. To date, four states (Tennessee, Utah, Virginia and North Carolina) offer licenses to any state resident who passes the state driving test, regardless of their legal status. Minnesota officials should examine the effectiveness of the laws in these states as it pertains to the rate of insurance

coverage among immigrant drivers; employment stability; and negative interactions with law enforcement.

Local Leadership

- Integrating Latino members into local community leadership positions decreases the "insider/outsider" perspective, builds cultural bridges within the community, provides positive role models for young Latinos and helps reduce the overall cultural tension in the community. Local community leaders are urged to discuss how to recruit Latino community members into local positions on the school board, city council, chamber of commerce and other local leadership structures. In addition, established community leaders should support the emergence of Latino-specific support groups, as a source for future community leaders.

While the above action steps are not an automatic fix for successfully meeting the challenge in rural communities experiencing increasing racial and ethnic diversity, they are a start. The sooner communities recognize the bicultural tensions and issues in their community as community-wide challenges instead of problems caused by the presence of Latinos, the sooner they will begin positively meeting those challenges.

La vitalidad de las comunidades latinas en Minnesota rural

Resumen Ejecutivo

A lo largo del país muchos se han tomado sorprendido por el nuevo Censo indicando una proporción alta de crecimiento en la población latina. En algunas comunidades de Minnesota rural, la población latina ahora cuenta con aproximadamente un cuarto de los residentes de la comunidad. En Minnesota, la población latina se estima de por lo menos 3 por ciento de la población total. Desde la diversificación temprana de estas comunidades rurales, ha habido preguntas y forcejeos como estos pueblos ha buscado ajustar a su demografía cambiante. Este proyecto busca identificar y medir barreras específicas y apoyos para el desarrollo de la comunidad por los latinos en Minnesota rural.

Se examinó el desarrollo de la comunidad en siete comunidades de Minnesota rural con las condiciones pertinente a la perspectiva latina. Las siete comunidades rurales seleccionadas para este estudio son Willmar, Worthington, Albert Lea, Owatonna, St. James, Pelican Rapids y Long Prairie.

Este estudio reveló mucha fuerza en estas siete comunidades. Los latinos traen una mano de obra significante, y son dueños de comercio y líderes del pueblo (miembros de concilio de ciudad, miembros de la junta escolares, etc.) entienden las contribuciones económicas de la comunidad latina. Los residentes expresan apreciación por el multiculturalismo traído al pueblo bajo la influencia de la cultura latina. Educadores y líderes de la comunidad notaron que la exposición a cultural y las diferencias del idioma dan una vista más realista del mundo a los niños y a familias.

Algunas comunidades han desarrollado fuerzas de tarea de diversidad culturales y otras iniciativas para responder a la diversidad creciente en estos pueblos. Las bibliotecas multiculturales son en obras en dos de las comunidades, y las personas aparecen ser excitadas sobre estos esfuerzos. Las organizaciones latinas están surgiendo en algunas de las comunidades. Estas organizaciones esperan servir la comunidad entera ofreciendo un puente y un camino para el desarrollo de la carrera por los latinos.

Hay preocupación continuada, sin embargo, sobre cómo la comunidad mayor ve su relación a la comunidad latina. Rochin & del la Torre (1991) sugiere que esto es crítico en el desarrollo de la comunidad exitoso. ¿La comunidad ve los problemas de los latinos como los problemas de la comunidad?

Los resultados de este proyecto sugerirían que las comunidades consideren los pasos de acción siguientes en su proceso continuado de desarrollo:

La educación

- "Uno de los resultados más alarmantes del estudio fue el número consistentemente alto de abandonos de la escuela secundaria informado entre los latinos jóvenes. Muchos enfocan que los participantes de grupo citaron esto como el problema más saliente.

  Las tales proporciones de fracaso deben verse como inaceptable. La educación y líderes de la comunidad, con los padres dirigirse este problema crítico deben venir juntos, o enfrenta la realidad que un porcentaje significante de la mano de obra futura de su comunidad será desprevenido tener éxito en una economía conocimiento-basado creciente.

- La educación continuando entre la población latina adulta también era un problema de gran preocupación, como se vio como una manera primaria al adelanto en la mano de obra y crea una generación de líderes latinos.

El idioma

- Pocas barreras citadas por los participantes eran mayores o más fundamentales que la barrera del idioma. La necesidad para la educación de la comunidad bilingüe no puede infravalorarse. La falta de servicios del intérprete calificados inhibe la habilidad de latinos de actuar recíprocamente adecuadamente con las instituciones de la comunidad importantes, como el hospital y clínicas de cuidado de salud, entrada en vigor de la ley, el sistema judicial y agencias del gobierno.

  El Título VI del Acta de Derechos Civiles de 1964 requiere que todos los programas que reciben la ayuda federal proporcionan apropiado a los servicios interpretivos y traducción de materiales escrito para los clientes la habilidad inglesa limitada. Mientras es poco realista pedir a los hospitales rurales, clínicas, y otras instituciones de la comunidad mantener a los intérpretes a tiempo completo, soluciones innovadoras, incluso el uso de alternativas de telecomunicación estatal debe explorarse.

La entrada en vigor de la ley

- Las tensiones y desconfianza entre la comunidad latina y no debe desestimarse por los oficiales de ley locales. Esta tensión es el resultado de casualidades que van de las equivocaciones simples sobre las regulaciones locales al perfil racial. Los oficiales de ley locales entrevistados a menudo notaron la necesidad de personal bilingüe y policías biculturales. Los funcionarios contratados serían una salida buena, junto con mejorar la competencia cultural de funcionarios existentes.

- Una fuente importante de tensión es el problema y debate el acceso circundante a las licencias de chóferes entre los latinos sin tener en cuenta su estado legal. Este problema necesita ser resuelto productivamente. Al dia de hoy, cuatro estados (Tennessee, Utah, Virginia y Carolina del Norte) otorgan las licencias a cualquier residente del estado que pasa la prueba tendencia estatal, sin tener en cuenta su estado legal. Oficiales de Minnesota deben examinar la efectividad de las leyes en estos estados como él pertenece a la proporción del fondos de seguro entre los chóferes inmigrantes; la estabilidad del empleo; e interacciones negativas con la entrada en vigor de la ley.

La Dirección local

- Los miembros latinos integrando en la dirección de la comunidad local posicionan las disminuciones la perspectiva del extranjero, figuras los puentes culturales dentro de la comunidad, proporciona el papel positivo planea para los latinos jóvenes y ayuda a reducir la tensión cultural global en la comunidad. Los líderes de la comunidad locales deben discutir cómo reclutar a los miembros de la comunidad latinos en posiciones locales en la junta escolar, concilio de la ciudad, la cámara de comercio y otras estructuras de dirección locales. Además, los líderes de la comunidad establecidos deben apoyar ayuda a grupos de apoyo latinos, como una fuente para los líderes de la comunidad futuros. .

Mientras los pasos de acción anteriores no son una solución automática para resolver los asuntos que surgen en el área rural relacionados con la diversidad racial y étnica, ellos son una salida. Mientras más pronto las comunidades reconocen las tensiones biculturales y problemas en su comunidad como más pronto ellos empezarán a resolver sus asuntos positivamente.

Introduction

Throughout the country, the new Census numbers indicating a high rate of growth in the Latino population have taken many by surprise. This pattern of growth may not have come as such a surprise to some of Minnesota's rural communities, however. In some rural Minnesota communities, the Latino population now accounts for approximately one quarter of the community's residents. Overall, the Latino population is estimated to account for approximately 3 percent of Minnesota's total population. However, the settling of Latinos in rural areas of our state is not a recent phenomenon. For over 50 years now, Latinos have been arriving in Minnesota's non-metropolitan areas to take advantage of employment opportunities and the small-town living that many left back home.

Since the early diversification of these rural communities, there have been questions and struggles as these towns have sought to adjust to the changing population. Now, as new and established Latino communities continue to grow throughout the state, these questions seem of greater importance to Latinos and non-Latinos alike. What is the experience of Latinos and non-Latinos in these communities? How do Latinos and the overall community perceive the health of their communities? Are some Latino communities thriving? What do these rural communities look like? What factors are contributing to their positive growth, and what are the barriers to the formation of thriving communities? Answers to these questions could set the stage for the continued growth and vitality of all of Greater Minnesota's communities.

Literature Review

Minnesota is not alone in the evolution of its rural communities. Researchers in the West and Southwest of the United States have focused attention on the changing non-metropolitan demographics in their regions. Despite some differences between these Western communities and the communities in the present study, it is helpful to highlight some of their salient findings regarding Latino community development.

Previous researchers report that the issues of employment opportunities and working conditions play a major role in the development of Latino communities. Not surprisingly, Latino communities have developed in rural areas in which there were abundant job opportunities. In the Midwest, and certainly in Greater Minnesota, the job opportunities for newly arriving Latinos have largely consisted of physical labor. Generally, these opportunities exist in one or two major plants that operate in or near the impacted rural community. Researchers have also found that Latinos'

concentration in low skill jobs, limited English skills, limited education and limited capital have restricted their opportunities for social and economic advancement in rural communities (Rochin & de la Torre, 1991). In some areas, their confinement to one or two major employers in the community, combined with a growing number of available workers, has allowed those employers to dictate the conditions, wages and welfare of their employees (Rochin, 1995). Whatever the specific reasons, Latinos in non-metropolitan areas have experienced more hardships, less access to varied employment and less job quality than their non-minority and metropolitan counterparts (Jensen, 1994).

Unless specific barriers such as language, transportation, daycare or lack of additional work skills are addressed, it would appear that Latinos would continue to experience these hardships. It is not only in the area of employment, however, that these barriers limit the Latino community. It has been suggested that these same barriers also impact Latinos' access to and quality of health care (Albrecht et al., 1998), relationships with the public and private schools, and their ability to establish themselves as part of the community (Jensen, 1994).

There is also continued concern over whether these rural communities can provide needed services to reduce these barriers for their new Latino residents (Rochin & de la Torre, 1991). In fact, a central question may be how the broader community views their role/relationship and responsibility to the Latino community. In many communities there is an insider/outsider mentality where non-Latino members consider the Latinos to be "outsiders" (Naples, 1991). Thus, Latinos are alienated from the rest of the community, at times even by physical location, and are often not included in the majority of activities or decisions that go on in their town. It is also suggested that decisions on the state and federal level regarding Latinos can often contribute to this sense of "otherness" on the community level (Cantú, 1995). Recognizing Latinos as part of the community, then, is considered by some researchers (Allensworth & Rochin, 1998a) to be the most important step in creating positive change in the community. By including Latinos in community planning, incorporating them into community clubs and activities and even helping non-Latinos to learn Spanish, communities can bridge differences and work together to develop thriving communities (Allensworth & Rochin, 1998a).

For many non-Latino residents of rural communities, however, ethnic differences and perceptions of deterioration in the community that they attribute to the increase in Latino residents have led them to abandon their communities. In fact, it is suggested that some of the dramatic changes in the makeup of rural communities may have as much to do with the declining non-Latino population, which generally has a higher socio-economic status, as it does with the increase in the Latino population. The decision of many non-Latino residents not to address the needs of the newer Latino residents, combined with the departure of non-Latinos, results in a

failure to promote the community's overall development and contributes to the general perception of deterioration (Allensworth & Rochin, 1998).

Standing between the established non-Latino community and the newer Latino residents is a host of long-term Latino residents who have established their place in the rural communities. It is suggested (Allensworth & Rochin, 1998a) that these Latinos occupy a "social buffering" position because of their ties with both the non-Latino residents and new Latino immigrants. Many occupy higher-level jobs, have established more stable residences and have better English skills than their newer counterparts. A recent *Newsweek* article (September, 2000) highlighted the tension that can exist in many communities between established Latino residents and newer immigrants. For some established Latino residents, the influx of new Latinos has brought (sometimes for the first time) negative repercussions from the non-Latino residents who fail to distinguish the new arrivals from the established residents. On the other hand, some of the newer Latino residents are resentful of their established counterparts, feeling that they are not offering help and seem to have abandoned many of their Latino traditions and values. The same article noted, however, that some people feel that the overall growth has benefited both sides, revitalizing the Latino identity in the established community, which in turn can provide needed leadership for the newer community.

Overall, rural community development generally and Latino community development specifically appears to be affected by the interaction and collaboration between the established and newer Latino community as well as the non-Latino community. Previous studies emphasize the importance of recognizing the contributions of non-Latinos as well as the characteristics of Latinos in these rural communities. Finally, barriers of language, employment skills, advancement opportunities, and access to services seem to be the most salient factors inhibiting the development of thriving communities. The current project seeks to identify and examine specific barriers and supports for community development for Latinos in Greater Minnesota.

Project Overview

Community development was examined in seven Greater Minnesota communities with terms relevant to the Latino perspective and not utilizing standards of acculturation with the existing non-Latino population. In each community, two bilingual facilitators and one bilingual note-taker conducted two Latino focus groups and one non-Latino focus group with members of the communities. Additionally, several individual interviews were conducted in each of the seven selected communities.

The seven communities selected for this study are Willmar, Worthington, Albert Lea, Owatonna, St. James, Pelican Rapids and Long Prairie. We acknowledged that any sample of rural Minnesota communities would be inadequate, due to the unique nature of all towns. Given that assumption, we made an effort to select communities varying in geographic location, population size and diversity, type of local industry and level of establishment of the Latino community. Table 1 offers a summary of the population data for each selected community. The following is a short rationale for the selection of each community:

- ***Willmar:*** Latinos have a long history of living in this community. In terms of raw numbers, it has the third highest Latino population in the state. There is a good base of Latino leadership in the community.
- ***Worthington:*** This Latino community has shown rapid growth recently and is also relatively well established. The Latino population makes up almost 20 percent of the overall population in Worthington, and there is an emerging Latino leadership in town.
- ***Albert Lea:*** Latinos here have a very long history as migrant and factory workers. A large number of Latinos have recently taken permanent residence with their families in the community.
- ***St. James:*** This Latino community has shown rapid population growth in the last five to seven years, and now almost a quarter of the population consists of Latinos. The community is establishing a new multicultural library.
- ***Owatonna:*** The Latino community here has shown steady growth over the years. Owatonna has both supportive community organizations and several Latino-owned businesses.
- ***Pelican Rapids:*** Pelican Rapids has experienced recent population growth in several of its immigrant communities. Latinos account for close to 20 percent of the overall population. They are also establishing a multicultural library.

- ***Long Prairie:*** This Latino community is in the earlier stages of development despite some long-term Latino residents. At this point, Latinos already account for almost 10 percent of the overall population.

Table 1: *Populations in Participating Communities*

Community	Total Population	Latino Population	Percent Latino
Albert Lea	18,356	1,740	9.5
Long Prairie	3,040	285	9.4
Owatonna	22,434	967	4.3
Pelican Rapids	2,374	465	19.6
St. James	4,695	1,116	23.8
Willmar	18,351	2,911	15.9
Worthington	11,283	2,175	19.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 summary file, matrices PL1, PL2, PL3 and PL4

Research Participants

Each community was contacted to identify contacts and organizations that work with the Latino population. An effort was made to create Latino focus groups consisting of both established residents in the Latino population and newer Latino residents. Participants in the non-Latino focus groups were also representative of various constituencies in the community. All participants were asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire at the beginning of each focus group. Participants were informed that their conversations would be taped and notes would be taken, but that all material would be confidential. Focus groups lasted approximately one hour, and participants were compensated for expenses incurred in order to participate in the focus groups.

Representatives of various sectors of the community were also contacted for short individual interviews. Generally, an effort was made to have interviews with community leaders (mayor, city council members), school officials (principals, school board members), law enforcement (police chiefs, judges, liaisons), social service representatives (county agency workers, community organizers), church representatives, and business owners in each community. These interviews were also recorded. Table 2 summarizes the total number of research participants.

Table 2: *Total number of participants*

Latino Focus Groups	Non-Latino Focus Groups	Individual Interviews	Total Participants
124	71	75	269

The current study consisted of both quantitative and qualitative methods. All focus group participants were asked to complete data sheets on which they provided anonymous descriptive information including gender, marital status, employment status, length of time residing in the community and community and countries of origin (see Appendix A). It should be noted that not all participants chose to fill out this demographic data sheet, and therefore our total number of participants varies from the numbers summarized in Tables 3 and 4.

Latino focus groups and individual interviews were designed to elicit a sense of the Latino experience in that rural community. Specific questions focused on employment, housing and education, as well as visions of the community, needs of the community and social interactions with non-Latinos in the community (see Appendix B).

The questions for the non-Latino focus groups and individual interviews were designed to gather a sense of the broader community's knowledge of and reaction to the Latino community in their town. Participants were asked to consider the reaction of non-Latino residents to the growth of the Latino community, Latinos' contributions to the community, perceived needs or problems in the overall community, vision for the overall community and social interaction with the Latino community (see Appendix C).

Analysis

Tape recordings were made of all focus groups and most individual interviews. In a few cases participants requested not to be recorded or recording was not possible. Notes were also taken of every focus group and, when possible, of individual interviews. In addition, facilitators and note-takers met and debriefed about each community at the completion of the data gathering to summarize their perception of major points and issues and to add information that was perhaps not captured by other collection methods. Data were then analyzed using accepted methods in which the data and themes emerge from the narrative of the text.

Results

The findings from this study are complex and varied. Eight primary variables contributing to the vitality, well being and overall health of Latino communities in rural Minnesota emerged from the analysis. While these variables or themes are not completely independent (there are overlapping concepts between the themes), collapsing themes beyond this level results in a significant loss of information in the analysis. The eight themes emerging from the interviews and focus groups are "Latino Contributions to the Community," "Community Responses," "Education," "Housing," "Language," "Latino Leadership," "Cultural Tensions" and "Employment."

To capture the most meaningful and relevant information in the rich data, each of these eight themes will be individually discussed with supporting information and examples. It should also be noted that this report will use the terms Latinos and non-Latinos when describing a person's or group's ethnicity. While there is controversy within the Latino community regarding preferred terminology, it was decided for this study that the term "Latinos" captures the diversity of the community. "Chicanos" has traditionally referred to those people with Mexican ancestry, and "Hispanic" to those from Spanish backgrounds. Latinos generally refers to those people with ancestry in Latin America.

It should be acknowledged that this study has made every effort to provide a balanced picture of life in rural Minnesota for both Latinos and non-Latinos. The information we received from the Latino participants was strikingly similar from town to town. Due to the fact that our participants were voluntary, the non-Latino focus group participants may not have been fully representative of the diverse non-Latino opinions in each town. In spite of this, strong themes emerged across the communities.

Latinos' contributions to the community

Latino community members contribute in a variety of ways to these rural Minnesota towns. Participants mentioned these contributions as primary factors creating good will and successful interaction in town. The towns where these contributions were most openly recognized seemed to have a higher level of acceptance (and even appreciation) of the Latinos' presence in their community.

Specifically, Latinos bring a significant workforce to these communities. It is noted that Latinos are good, reliable workers. Latinos appreciate the work and report that it is easy to find work of certain types (factory, cleaning, etc.).

Additionally, business owners and other town leaders (city council members, school board members, etc.) understand the economic contributions of the Latino

community. The contribution to the city and county tax base is noted. Business owners expressed appreciation for the manner in which Latinos met their financial obligations. Many participants recognized that some of the public schools in these communities would be closed because of low numbers if the Latino students were not present.

"If not for the Latinos, we probably would have had to close a school. Because of the number of students (in the Latino community), we can maintain the schools."

"I wish all of my customers were as reliable and honest as my Latino customers. I would love to have more customers like them."

Residents in these seven communities express appreciation for the multiculturalism brought to town under the influence of the Latino culture. They enjoy the diversity in food, restaurants, festivals and language. Educators and community leaders noted that the exposure to cultural and language differences gave children and families a more "realistic" view of the world.

"Now, you can see a variety of foods in the grocery stores — it's very interesting."

"There are Mexican restaurants in town, so you can have diversity in food without leaving town."

"It's fun to see the diversity and hear Spanish spoken in the streets and in the stores."

The non-Latinos who recognize these contributions tend to be more interested in finding ways for the greater community to reach out to the Latinos. Latinos who feel that their contributions are recognized tend to feel more connected to the greater community.

Community Responses

Two threads of community response were identified from the data. These two threads could be characterized in two ways: 1) efforts to respond in an organized, helpful manner and 2) resistance to change. The Latino experience in these communities blends these two threads, and thus we have not separated them in our discussion.

Latinos reported feeling welcomed initially in some of the communities involved in this project. In other communities, the Latinos said that they had never felt welcomed and some even reported a feeling of tension about their presence in the community. Some participants distinguished between the "people" of the towns and the "institutions." Those making this distinction felt that the people were largely

welcoming or at least neutral, but that the institutions resisted their presence in town. Participants in both the Latino and non-Latino groups mention an increase in comfort level and appreciation for cultural diversity in the last few years in town.

"No siempre sentimos bienvenidos aqui. A veces, si."
"Poco a poco este mejorando el discriminacion."

In response to the increased diversity in their population, most communities have developed a cultural diversity task force of some sort and other initiatives to respond to the increasing diversity in town. In these communities, Latinos are beginning to gain some leadership in town through business ownership and other professional positions (in social services and law enforcement agencies in particular). One Latino professional/community leader interviewed noted:

"I want people to start seeing us as human beings and as equals ... that we are Hispanics trying to be part of the community."

Multicultural libraries are under construction in two of the communities, and people appear to be excited about the impact of these efforts. Multicultural/international festivals occur during the summer in several of the communities. Communities that have been proactive in building bridges between the recent immigrants and long-time residents have been more successful. For example, Todd County has been proactive in creating the Todd County Hispanic Liaison Program, with the mission of providing non-monetary assistance to the Hispanic community in Todd County. Both Latinos and Non-Latinos cited this office and staff as significant in enabling Long Prairie and the surrounding county to positively respond to the changing environment.

In some of the communities, the churches have taken a leadership role in encouraging cross-cultural interaction. Many churches have also struggled with the integration of different worship traditions across the cultures. As a result, some have integrated and others have segregated faith communities. The impact of these church communities is often significant:

"Father ... came here as a bilingual priest. He has done great things for both Anglo and Latino. He really created a community and it spilled out into the streets. ... Protestants admire him as well."

In a few communities, local health services recognized the cultural barriers to quality service provision and modified many service delivery systems (paperwork,

signage, intake systems) to better serve the diverse community. These agencies have generally sought outside training and advice in helping to build such bridges.

In spite of these efforts, the members of the focus groups held for the Latino communities expressed many concerns regarding differential (possibly racist) treatment in the community. Examples of these Latino experiences include unfounded accusations of stealing in local stores; lack of responsiveness to problems experienced by Latino children in schools; perceived racial profiling by police; requests for immigration and other legal documents in inappropriate settings; difficulties finding housing; difficulties accessing health care; and social service agencies' failure to provide services or resources and referrals. Latinos report being questioned by social service agencies in several towns about their reasons for moving to town without enough money or housing.

"Especially in the stores you feel the discrimination. … It's just something you feel. They think we are going to steal something."

"My son was sick … and the doctor assumed that my son was drinking or doing drugs. There was no immediate help in the emergency room."

Several non-Latino participants acknowledged that racism plays a large role in the discrimination experienced by the Latinos:

"I have seen incidents of discrimination based solely on skin color."

"Those Latinos who appear more 'Indian' or darker skinned seem to have the most difficulty with police and store owners."

Unfortunately, some of the communities and their surrounding counties have a history of struggle regarding the influx of Latinos. In one case several years ago, a county commissioner took offense at some of the efforts being made to increase the integration of Latinos into the community. He then limited funds to such programs and made public remarks that many experienced as racist. In another example, some of the first Latino residents in the area were recruited for work in one of the local food processing plants. Single, young Mexican males were recruited as workers and were brought to town from Texas. Little assistance in acculturation was offered these men, and many of these people were fleeing undesirable conditions in Texas. This was a poor start for group relationships in that county, and some non-Latinos maintain the attitudes formed in these early years.

While most Latinos interviewed felt that discrimination has lessened in the last five years, there is a sense that some members of all of these seven communities may discriminate or fail to accept Latinos based on skin color and assumptions about level of education.

"It was easier for me than for my husband. He is more* Moreno *than me. People can be very racist."

Clearly, these are issues of race and class bias that exist across many communities, but may be expressed more clearly in smaller towns with a homogeneous past.

In some communities, there is a "split" Latino community. Specifically, this has occurred in those towns in which the Latino community is composed of both Latinos whose families have lived in the area since the 1950s or the 1960s and Latinos who are relatively recent arrivals to the town. This difference has a significant impact on both the experience of these Latinos and the reaction of other residents to them. Both groups of Latinos feel some mistrust toward the other. The non-Latino community often fails to distinguish between the groups and their needs. The residents of the community appear to get caught in the middle: one interviewee noted that

"...the migrants view long-term Latino residents as Anglo, and the Anglos wonder when the long-term Latino residents will return to Mexico with everyone else."

The divided Latino community has made it difficult to develop a consistent response (either by Latino or traditional organizations) to the needs of Latinos. This challenges the community to generate innovative interventions that meet the needs of all Latinos in their town.

Thus, while there have been many community-wide initiatives to address the concerns of increased diversity in these towns, many problems persist. Some of these problems are the result of "cultural tensions," and are further explored in that section of this report. The community response must now become deeper, moving beyond surface differences, and offer methods to overcome the barriers that remain. It would be easy for people in these communities to become discouraged about the impact of community responses, but this would be a mistake. Positive changes in communities take sustained time and effort. Systems and practices may need to become flexible to be inclusive to new community members.

Education

Formal education remains a crucial foundation for advancement in our society. Those without a high school education find it difficult to move beyond positions as "unskilled and/or casual labor." It is also unusual to advance within a company without a college education. For immigrants and other working class people, education is one key to a more comfortable life.

With this in mind, educational needs for Latinos in rural Minnesota were found to be varied and deep. All of the communities mentioned a concern about the high school graduation rate for Latino students. There is a significant concern that Latino youth are dropping out of high school as soon as they legally can.

Across communities, we find a significant dropout rate and a very low graduation rate for Latino youth. Obviously, this is a concern as Latino youth will be unable to attend college if they are unable to complete high school. This barrier perpetuates the dearth of qualified Latino and bilingual leaders in these rural communities. In the words of one non-Latino community leader:

"The Latinos who are most successful here are distinguished by being able to speak English (and Spanish) and by education."

In a different town, the interconnection between education and Latino leadership is corroborated:

"We need more professionals, not just factory workers. This is a necessity for role models on an educational level."

Despite desiring more Latino leadership and more bilingual workers, these towns are having a difficult time retaining their Latino students through the completion of high school. Specifically, school personnel have concerns about truancy, tardiness and inconsistent attendance of the Latino students. It can also be challenging for school staff to distinguish ESL needs from other academic difficulties.

Latino parents expressed concern that their children are picked on and teased by non-Latinos, and that school personnel sometimes do not appear to act to prevent this.

"My son doesn't want to go to school. Starting in seventh grade, the Anglos began to call him names and pick on him. I told the principal, but nothing changes."
"Our children get picked on and no one does anything. There is no one at the school that I feel will listen or help. Some teachers (who speak Spanish) try to help but they have little time."

The youth interviewed reported that they experienced racist attitudes and behavior from other students with little overt consequence from school authorities. School authorities respond that most of the tension they see is "intra-group," or Latino versus Latino.

There are also success stories. These included representation of Latino youth on the school's student council and in the homecoming courts as well as Latinos who have gone away to college and returned to the community as role models for other youth.

For the future, there is an ongoing need for advocates in the K-12 schools to help Latino families be involved with and connected to the schools. Local employers may need to be reminded of their legal and ethical obligations to allow family participation in the schools. Resources are needed when children are ill and parents are not allowed to take time off from work to care for them. This kind of situation often results in an older child staying home from school as well since parents fear losing their jobs if they remain home to care for an ill child. Latinos and non-Latinos suggested that schools could also use the Latinos as resources to teach non-Latinos about culture and language. There is also a need for adult education — ESL, general education and vocational education. Some participants were hopeful that the local community colleges would be more active and involved in providing educational resources and opportunities.

Housing

Affordable and safe housing is an important need in all communities surveyed. Concerns were expressed that landlords do not want to rent to large families. Many Latino participants told of landlords either not answering their doors or stating that the apartment/house had just been rented when the landlord saw a Latino coming for the rental appointment. One Latino related:

"My daughter speaks good English. Over the phone she was told that a house was available to rent and made an appointment to see the house. When she got there, the landlord wouldn't open the door — he could see that she is Mexican."

As a result of similar challenges, one Latina indicated that her family lived in a garage for three months before being able to find suitable and affordable housing.

Participants in the non-Latino focus groups and interviews corroborated this experience of the Latinos:

"The landlord isn't discriminating — he just doesn't want 20 people in his apartment designed for four or five."

"My friend said that he would be happy to rent to Latinos, but he knows that they will just sneak their families in as well."

People in both the Latino and non-Latino focus groups noted that a small group of irresponsible Latinos have negatively impacted the attitude of many landlords regarding renting to Latinos. It is particularly difficult to find rental housing if a Latino/a has children.

Some Latinos have successfully worked with local realtors to take advantage of state and federal programs for home buying. Several communities reported increased Latino home ownership in recent years. In spite of the progress made, problems rooted in a lack of respect and openness still exist. With home ownership, there are also reports of housing difficulties exacerbated by prejudice. When Latinos try to buy homes, there can be resistance in the neighborhood. Specifically, one Latina reported that a neighborhood held a special meeting to discuss her offer to buy a home.

Housing for seasonal workers presents a particular problem for some communities. The companies using seasonal workers used to operate "camps" to house these people who were temporarily living far from home. These factories and companies have shut down some of the camps. The camps that remain are inadequate and cramped. This creates a seasonal housing crunch in addition to the general affordable housing problem in communities with seasonal workers. The housing owned by the companies for the migrants also needs renovation and improvement.

One attempted solution to the housing crunch has been to develop the trailer courts, which appear now to be creating their own set of problems. There is concern that the trailer courts may not be well regulated, potentially resulting in future increased housing problems.

Housing services for newly arrived residents, including bilingual information regarding town customs and expectations, were suggested to help prevent problems. Both Latino and non-Latino participants suggested that Latino-operated agencies may be particularly helpful in responding to this need.

Language

Language remains a barrier in most towns. It is awkward to communicate without fluency in one another's language, and misunderstandings can flourish. Many non-Latino participants feel strongly that Latinos should learn English. Many Latino participants acknowledge that English skills can open many doors for career advancement and choice. Some non-Latinos feel uncomfortable around Spanish-speaking Latinos, and often they report feeling as though the Latinos are "talking about" them.

> ***"My sister-in-law works in the grocery store and she says that you can hear them (Latinos) speaking English in the aisles, but that they pretend that they can't speak English when they get up to the register."***

"You can tell that they are talking about me when they giggle and speak in Spanish..."

Participants acknowledge that some residents remain convinced that the only language that should be spoken in the United States is English. This can cause additional tension:

"I thought this was America," was overheard when Spanish was spoken on the speaker in a department store.

"I am being forced to look at and pay for signs in their language."

Due to the language barrier, many Latinos who are trained for professional or semi-professional work are only able to work on the assembly line in large plants. This is significant in an economy in need of such professionals.

False perceptions of each other are maintained due to the segregation of the social groups, and this segregation is deepened by the social awkwardness that exists when people cannot speak one another's language. Latinos report a feeling of "exclusion" and fear of non-Latinos' reactions to the initiation of social contact. This sense is corroborated by the non-Latinos interviewed:

"I get the feeling from (Latino) adults that they hold themselves back some because they don't think they will be accepted, and others who would want to interact aren't sure of their verbal ability."

Everyone agrees that there is a need for more translators, particularly in social, educational and health services. Most participants also agree that both ESL and SSL (Spanish as a second language) classes would be valuable for all community members.

Latino leadership

Participants mentioned the need to get Latinos more involved in leadership positions in rural communities. Current community leadership needs to better understand how to tap the expertise of the Latino community. Latinos want to see that their input is taken seriously and used appropriately when given. Career ladders that help develop and nurture leadership skills for Latinos are needed across industries.

Additionally, the need for bilingual workers and leadership within the Latino community emerged across participants. It was suggested that Latino-centered agencies could be developed both to serve the current needs of Latinos in rural

Minnesota and to advocate for system and community changes needed by the Latino community.

Latino organizations are emerging in some of the communities. These organizations hope to serve the entire community by simultaneously offering a bridge between communities and a path for career development for Latinos. For example, there is a Latino-organized group primarily serving the migrant community called Centro Campesino. Although this group is controversial, it has emerged to address the needs of seasonal and migrant workers in town and thus to build a bridge from this group to the greater community. It is particularly noteworthy that this organization originates from and works for its own community.

Cultural tensions

Cultural differences are a source of tension between the communities. It is easy for both communities to misunderstand the intent of the other. Differences regarding the importance of punctuality, the role of authority in the culture, home and yard care, parking, ways of celebrating and socializing, and the role of children in day-to-day life can create significant difficulties.

> ***"People make judgements that we (Latinos) are messy because we use our yard differently. In Mexico, most of us didn't have a front yard like you do here in Minnesota, and we treat it differently. The neighbors don't like this and think that we are messy."***

Both communities are unsure that the other group is interested in getting to know them. Both groups feel the failure of the other to reach across the barriers and create a sense of community or unity. Some members of the Latino community may be from small towns in Mexico, and may hold the very conservative views regarding gender roles, religion, etc. of those communities. Some Latinos are concerned that their own community may be losing some of its traditions and values. Differences in and misinterpretations of customs regarding food, manner of living, observance of holidays and celebrations all add to the challenge of open communication for both sub-communities. For example, differences in values and lifestyles are attributed solely to race and generalized to all Latinos. Additionally, these differences are not understood as culturally rooted, but rather seen as "wrong" and as evidence in support of racist views.

The cultural ethnocentrism intersects with "small-town attitudes" (referred to in previous research as an "insider-outsider" perspective) to increase the tension and feelings of exclusion. Interestingly, the arrival of newer and more culturally distant immigrants, such as Somalis and Bosnians, has made the Latinos seem more like "old

timers" in several of these towns, and thus the Latinos have felt more accepted. As one participant noted:

"Since the Bosnians have come, the Hispanics became more accepted. The Bosnians are now the underclass. The Hispanics are more familiar and active. ..."

Or in a different town, ***"Having the Somalis here, we hear a lot less complaints about the Latinos."***

This experience is an old pattern in immigration in the United States as class, time in the U.S. and ethnicity interact to create a sort of "pecking order" in our communities.

These issues combine to create generally segregated communities. Few participants report socializing outside of their own ethnic group. Issues of financial status and assumed class status also serve as barriers to interaction. The lack of interaction between these "parallel communities" is fertile ground for misinterpretation and myth regarding each other. Non-Latinos cited "special privileges" allegedly given to Latinos (e.g., they pay no taxes for seven years), and Latinos hold different values and norms than fit with some of the customs and regulations (e.g., parking) in rural Minnesota. A number of "rural myths" or "cultural myths" exist regarding the Latino community in rural Minnesota. These myths survive as "truths" due to the lack of contact between the two cultures and due to ethnocentric opinions regarding the "correct" ways for community members to behave. Examples of these myths include beliefs that Latinos are comfortable living in substandard housing, that Latinos think that it is fine to be sexual with 12-year-old girls and that Latinos can speak and understand English but are simply unwilling to admit this. Non-Latinos worry when Latinos park their cars on the lawns of their homes. Non-Latinos sometimes feel excluded (or even as though they are the topic of conversation) when Latinos speak Spanish.

Even when these overtly negative reactions are absent, there is little social interaction between Latinos and non-Latinos other than that which is professionally necessary. Some non-Latinos feel that the Latinos segregate themselves. As one participant stated:

"They are so tight with family and extended family. We say 'hi' (the neighbors), but it's not like they are coming over to my house for the Vikings game on Sunday."

While Latinos respond when questioned directly that they do feel welcomed in many communities, they also report a feeling of "non-acceptance"; for example, they report that non-Latinos do not return or welcome their social overtures (greetings or smiles, etc.). Despite previously discussed efforts to address this, one resident's description of the non-Latino and Latino communities in St. James seems particularly apt: she described the two communities as involved in "parallel play." "Parallel play" is a developmental stage where toddlers play well near each other but tend not to interact with one another — in fact, these toddlers are generally irritated by interruption from each other. One Latino participant suggested that the best way for Latinos to create a future for themselves and their families in his town was to ***"get used to the discrimination."***

These cultural tensions and misunderstandings also impact law enforcement practices in these towns. One primary area of concern for law enforcement revolves around driver's licenses. Because the process for obtaining a driver's license contains many barriers for Spanish-speaking Latinos (language, laws, request for documentation of citizenship status), many drive without a license. This places local law enforcement in a bind: Do they turn the other way? Do they stop all Latinos (racial profiling) to check for legal driver's licenses? This issue is being discussed currently at the state level, and this research would support changes in current practice.

Differences in laws and town customs also create tensions for law enforcement. Some of the non-Latino participants believed that "drugs and violence follow Latinos." Some communities have experienced problems with Latino-sponsored dances or with drug raids in areas largely populated by Latinos, and these events have intensified this belief.

The Latino experience with law enforcement is often tense. Latinos feel "singled out" by law enforcement and have a sense that they are sometimes treated unjustly due to their ethnicity. For example, there are reports of harassment and unlawful search of Latinos by police officers.

"My son was in trouble, and the police arrived and searched the house without a warrant and without probable cause. I don't think this would have happened if I were not Latino."

"The police came to our house, put a gun to my brother's head, pushed him on the floor and searched him. He kept asking who he had killed. My brother went to jail. The police chief came back later and said he was sorry."

Additionally, Latinos feel that they receive different service from the police:

"The police treat people differently. They respond faster to my neighbors when they call than when I do."

"The police respond much faster to the white people in town. If you are minority, they don't arrive with the same speed, if at all."

Law enforcement officials in all of the communities in this study are clear about the need for more bilingual and bicultural police officers.

In summary, the need for ongoing bi-directional cultural education was a common theme of discussion. Communities need to create structures (social and physical) that encourage interaction across cultures. Participants were hopeful that the strengths of all cultures (Latino and Anglo in our study) could be supported as these communities moved toward an increasingly multicultural future. They imagined a community in which "old timers" and "newcomers" all feel welcomed and accepted and a media that emphasizes these positives.

In service of this goal, participants generated ideas including cultural community centers, mentor/partnership programs for families, day care, Head Start and support for children before kindergarten, support for bilingual education and services, videos to orient newcomers to town, cultural celebrations like Cinco de Mayo and activities for youth and children. Residents also want to make the town friendlier for all groups. Ideas include building city parks in diverse neighborhoods. Participants in nearly all towns specifically mentioned that the children play sports (particularly soccer) with one another, and this has offered an opportunity for increased contact and understanding across the two cultures.

Employment

One primary impetus for the increasing diversity in rural Minnesota is employment opportunity. Most Latinos moved to the communities in our study to find "good work" as well as to create a safe comfortable home for their families. They appreciate the opportunity to work.

Latinos note that jobs are not difficult to find, but that it is sometimes difficult to get treated fairly and with respect on the job. They report feeling as though different rules are in place for them than for the non-Latinos. They report instances on the job where their rights (breaks, equal pay for equal work, time off for medical care, etc.) are violated while white workers may be able to access those same rights.

"We don't have the freedom to go to the bathroom when we want. When we ask a supervisor for a replacement on the line, the supervisor agrees but never returns."

"If the U.S. employees get a little cut on their finger, they're able to go above and sit down."

They note that co-workers are not always welcoming and accepting, although some are. ***"It was very easy to make an application to the plant. After a while I began to feel some racism. Not from the owners but from my co-workers."*** Latinos also report that they receive little help from their respective labor unions. In some cases, temporary agencies work with Latinos, and this is not always a good match:

"The temporary agencies treat them (Latinos) badly. They get them in with a promise of good pay and then only work them one day a week. They can't even qualify for food stamps with a 20-hour minimum."

We were unable to identify any Latinos in upper management in any of the major employers in these communities. The failure to promote Latinos in these workplaces is likely due to multiple barriers (language, ethnic bias, education), but creates a significant division between labor and management.

The restrictions facing Latinos in the workplace impact their ability to participate in other areas of the larger community. This can exacerbate the misunderstandings discussed earlier. For example, if a Latino parent is unable to access his or her right to attend school conferences for his child, the teacher and school may interpret this as a failure to care about or value his child's education. This is probably very untrue, but he cannot risk his job and his family's well being in order to attend the meeting.

In addition, migrant workers experience specific problems. Some of these specific problems include housing and health care. Migrant workers also note that the unions in their factories do not help them with work related issues. When migrant workers have organized, they do not have a positive reception either from their local unions or the company. According to one local activist:

"(The company) is trying to shut down the camps and then tries to place the blame on the workers for organizing. ... The truth is that it's globalization."

Summary

At this point, the discussion can return to the initial questions: What is the experience of Latinos and non-Latinos in these seven rural Minnesota towns? What do these rural communities look like? Can we identify factors contributing to positive growth? Can we understand the barriers facing these communities as they move toward a thriving future? Overall, our findings are very similar to the results of research completed in other rural areas of the United States.

We find that the Latino immigration pattern in Minnesota follows jobs. In other words, Latinos tend to move to communities in Minnesota where they can find work. The Latinos interviewed report feeling welcomed overall in these communities. They appreciate the opportunity to work. Latinos are recognized for their work ethic, and some people fear that they are taken advantage of due to this value. Without ongoing education in English and general GED or other forms, these workers may find themselves "at the mercy" of their employers, as discussed by Rochin (1995).

The non-Latino residents of these communities express appreciation for the diversity brought by the Latino community, saying that the presence of the Latinos makes the towns feel "more cosmopolitan" and offers the youth of the town a "more realistic" view of the rest of the world. There are ongoing concerns, however, about how the greater community views their role in relationship to the Latino community. Rochin & de la Torre (1991) suggest that this is critical in successful community development. Does the community view the problems of the Latinos as problems of the community? For example, there is consistent concern regarding safe, affordable, accessible housing. There are examples of discrimination and poor treatment in the schools, by the police and by employers. Should the greater community tackle these issues directly and act to prevent continuing problems? If so, how and where would they begin? We believe that this study offers a rough blueprint for such a project, should these communities decide to "own" these concerns.

There is little social interaction beyond that needed professionally between the non-Latino community members and Latino community in any of the towns surveyed. As noted, this reflects an "insider/outsider" mentality found in previous research (Naples, 1991), and creates fertile ground for misunderstanding.

In fact, this research found a lack of mutual understanding regarding customs, priorities and cultural practices between the Non-Latino and Latino communities. Naples (1991) and Cantu (1995) both noted that Latinos in previously researched communities feel alienated from community leadership, thus leading to an increasing segregation. Cantu (1995) suggested that decisions on the state level can

either contribute to this sense of "otherness" or provide leadership to increase a sense of empowerment. Many participants in the current research mentioned the need for bi-directional cultural education.

Some of the differences in the demographics of the two communities are captured by Table 3 (some participants in the focus groups did not complete data sheets, thus the numbers vary from previous discussion).

Table 3: *Comparisons of focus group participants*

	Latinos (n=123) completed data sheets=120	**Non-Latinos (n=69)** completed data sheets=58
Female	72 (58%)	31 (45%)
Working Full Time	70 (57%)*	32 (46%)
Average years in Home	4.6	15.5
Average years in MN	7.2	38.7
Average years in U.S.	15.8	whole life**
Rent Home	50 (41%)***	10 (15%)
Born in U.S.	29 (24%)	55 (94%)

* *Seven participants indicated that they were full time in school and seven failed to submit the information.*

** *One participant lived outside the United States for five years and two others reported an average of 2.75 years in the United States.*

*** *Participants owning a trailer home indicated that they were not renting.*

These differences reflect the experiences discussed in the narratives of the report. In reviewing the table, one can also see the pattern of immigration to Minnesota. Most of the Latinos in Minnesota have been in the United States for a fairly lengthy time.

The language barrier also continues to be real and significant. The need for bilingual services, ESL and SSL educational services, translators and bilingual paperwork was noted repeatedly in every town in this study. Communities are requesting and searching for Latino leadership in their towns. They are hoping that they can utilize this leadership to bridge the gaps in understanding and language. These communities need to come to understand that some of this leadership already exists in their town if they can recognize it as such.

All participants envisioned a future of growth for their community. When asked about the future, the majority were hopeful and positive. People envision a time and place where all individuals are treated equally and with respect. They are hopeful that their children will lead them into increased acceptance and appreciation of diversity. Participants are accepting of a future rich in diversity, and some of the participants are excited about that vision.

"I think time heals a lot of this. My daughter is in second grade and has great friends who are minority, and she doesn't know anything different. In ten years, I think a lot of positive changes will happen."

Participants spoke of the need for equal treatment of all people, access to health care, schools and housing, and generally a more multicultural community. They mentioned the need for positive people who were able to "dream big" about the possibilities to move past tolerance in responding to this diversity. They see a hard-working Latino community that is strong and producing an increase of businesses and leaders while also interacting with the non-Latinos. Generally, people have a vision for the future of openness and respect; they simply do not know exactly how to get there at this time.

In summary, both the Latino and non-Latino communities in these seven towns are interested in a positive future. Both communities must partner with the strengths and be engaged in challenging the barriers identified. With financial and policy support from state and local government, businesses and local non-profits, these towns will continue on their journey to round the corner from acceptance to appreciation to thriving.

Future Action Steps

We have identified several critical issues that emerged consistently from the research. These issues need to be addressed at both the community and the state level if progress is to be made.

Education

- Providing a quality education for Minnesota's children is a fundamental key to their future contributions as adults in our state's workforce and as leaders in our home communities. One of the most alarming findings of the study was the consistently high number of high school dropouts reported among young Latinos and Latinas. Many focus group participants cited this as the most salient issue in all of the communities studied. Latino families and local school officials must redouble their efforts to find ways to work together to significantly increase the graduation rates among Latino students.

  Unfortunately, getting firm numbers of Latino dropouts is extremely difficult, due to the mobility of some Latino families. However, a look at the graduation rates in the communities in this study reveals only a small handful of Latino graduates. Community leaders must understand that failing to address this issue means that a significant component of the community's future workforce will be unprepared to succeed in our growing knowledge economy.

- Continuing education among the adult Latino population was also an issue of great concern, as it was seen as a way to advance in the workforce and create a generation of Latino leaders. Community, state and regional organizations should coordinate efforts to provide English proficiency and vocational education to the adult Latino population. Existing community and technical colleges in these communities would appear to be uniquely qualified to be providing these services.

Language

- Few barriers cited among the focus group participants were greater or more fundamental than the language barrier. The need for bilingual community education cannot be underestimated. In addition to ESL classes often provided in many towns, local communities should consider providing "Spanish as a Second Language" classes to community members wishing to learn the basics of the Spanish language.

- Many focus group participants cited concerns about the lack of interpreter services as Latinos interact with key community institutions, such as hospital and health care clinics, law enforcement, the judicial system, or government agencies. Often other family members, children, or neighbors are their only resource during these critical times. State and local officials should coordinate resources to ensure that professional interpreter services are accessible statewide. In fact, the 1964 Civil Rights act requires all programs receiving federal funds to provide adequate interpretive services and translation of written material to all clients with limited English proficiency. Utilizing advanced telecommunications technology, there is little reason for hospitals, police stations, clinics or courtrooms to feel that they must utilize children or other family members as interpreters during these important interactions.

Cultural Tensions/Law Enforcement

- Many participants cited incidents and tension between the Latino community and local law enforcement officials. These incidents can range from simple misunderstandings about local regulations, to racial profiling and outright harassment. Local law enforcement officials interviewed as part of this study often noted the need for greater bilingual and bicultural police officers. The Department of Public Safety should coordinate efforts with other state, county and local agencies to provide cultural education and training for law enforcement officials, along with a concerted effort to increase the number of bilingual officers.

- The issues surrounding Latinos' access to driver's licenses needs to be addressed. Lack of access to a driver's license is a key source of tension and frustration for all involved. To date, four states (Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Utah) issue licenses to state residents who pass a driving test, regardless of their legal status. Officials from those states suggest that immigrant residents, especially those in rural areas, where other transportation options are limited, are going to drive anyway. Access to a license documents driving proficiency, increases the rate of insurance coverage and provides immigrants with more reliable transportation to their employment setting. Minnesota officials should evaluate the effectiveness of the statutes in these states in determining how they choose to resolve this difficult and challenging issue.

Latino Leadership

- Integrating Latino members into local community leadership positions decreases the "insider/outsider" perspective, builds cultural bridges within the community,

provides positive role models for young Latinos and helps reduce the overall cultural tension in the community. Such structures can often resolve local problems and misunderstandings before they escalate into larger issues. Local members of the Latino and non-Latino community should explore ways to create bicultural leadership structures and recruit local Latino candidates for office on the city council, school board and other leadership positions. In addition, minority members should be encouraged to participate, and local leaders should support the emergence of Latino-specific support organizations, as well as traditional community-based service clubs and other social institutions.

- Many of the communities involved in this project recognized the need for additional Latino leadership/professionals in their town. They were hoping to resolve this problem by recruiting Latinos from outside of their community to come and work with them. This is a challenging resolution to the problem. Our research suggests that the communities would be more successful in training current members of the local Latino community into the jobs for which they are needed.

While the above action steps are not an automatic fix for successfully meeting the challenge in rural communities experiencing increasing racial and ethnic diversity, they are a start. The sooner communities recognize the bicultural tensions and issues in their community as community-wide challenges and not problems caused by Latinos, the sooner they will begin positively meeting those challenges.

Appendix: Participating communities

Latino Community Focus Group Participants Across Towns
(completed data sheets; n=120)

	Female	Yrs. in Home	Yrs. in MN	Yrs. in U.S.	Rent Home*	Born in U.S.
Albert Lea n=17 (16 data sheets)	12 70 %	3.4	7.8	12.4**	2 28%	12 70%
Long Prairie n=20 (17 data sheets)	9 47%	1.2	2.8	5.8	16 94%	1 6%
Owatonna n=28	19 68%	4***	6.1***	15.2	60%****	3 10%
Pelican Rapids n=18	6 33%	3.9	5.1	12.4	0 5 missing	0
St. James n=17	12 71%	8	10.5	23	5 29%	6 35%
Willmar n=16	7 44%	5.6	11.1	17.9	5 31%	4 25%
Worthington n=8	5 63%	6.7	7.1	23.75	6 75%	4 50%

** Those participants owning a mobile home (trailer) and renting a spot in a trailer court answered that they owned a home and were not renting.*

*** The members of the youth focus group had all lived in the USA for their whole lives.*

**** One of these focus groups consisted of migrant agricultural workers, so these questions were not relevant to their experience.*

***** An additional 33% from the migrant worker group indicated that they neither rent nor own a home.*

Non-Latino Community Focus Group Participants Across Towns
(completed data sheets; n=64)

	Female	Yrs. in Home	Yrs. in MN	Yrs. in U.S.	Rent Home	Born in U.S.
Albert Lea n=22 (15 data sheets)	9 60%	13.3	37.8	whole life	0	15 100%
Long Prairie n=11	9 82%	8.6	44.5	whole life	2 18%	11 100%
Owatonna n=4	3 75%	21.5	40.7	whole life	0	4 100%
Pelican Rapids n=8	6 75%	17	38.7	whole life (except 1 person)	2 18%	1 86%
St. James n=10	7 70%	17.6	44.1	whole life	2 20%	10 100%
Willmar n=9	5 55%	15.2	41.9	whole life	2 18%	9 100%
Worthington n=7	4 57%	15.5	23.5	*	2 28%	5 72%

**Four (57%) of the group indicated that they had lived in the United States for their entire lives, one lived outside the U.S. for five years and two others reported an average of 2.75 years in the United States.*

Communities and Participants

The following is a description of the seven rural communities involved in this study.

Albert Lea

Albert Lea is a town of 18,356 located in Freeborn County. Freeborn County is in southeastern Minnesota, about 100 miles south of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The largest segment of the non-white population is Latino, with recent census data indicating that 1,740 or 9.5 percent of the population of Albert Lea identifies itself as Latino (see Table 1). Albert Lea has the fifth largest number of Latinos outside Twin Cities, and ranks 31st in the state of Minnesota in terms of percentage of the city that identifies itself as Latino.

There are at least three Latino-owned businesses in town and Latinos are working across occupations, including in community agencies, such as chemical dependency, victim services and general advocacy. There is also some seasonal work in the area, and Farmland Foods is a primary employer of many recent immigrants. While the Latino community started out as migratory, from school district data we can conclude that a sizeable Latino population started settling here about 15-20 years ago. (In 1989-1990 school year there were 269 Latino students in the Albert Lea school district. In 1999-2000, there were 417.)

Three focus groups with a total of 39 participants and 10 individual interviews were conducted in Albert Lea in the fall of 2000 for this research project. The two focus groups with members of the Latino community (n=17 total; 16 completed data sheets) were both unique. One consisted of seven adults and the other had nine young adults and teens. In the adult focus group, six were female and five were married; three reported working full time. They report living in their current homes for an average of 2.7 years (ranging from one to four years); in Minnesota for an average of 4.7 years (ranging from four to seven years); and in the United States for an average of 12.4 years (ranging from eight to 25 years), although two participants stated that they had lived in the United States for all of their lives. Two of the participants reported that they currently rent their apartment or house. Four of the participants were born in Mexico, and three were born in Texas.

The second Latino focus group (n=9) consisted of six females. None of the participants reported being married and all of them reported being full-time students. They reported living in their current homes an average of 4.1 years (ranging from three months to 17 years), in Minnesota for an average of 10.9 (ranging from 2.5 to 18 years), and in the United States for their entire lives. One participant reported being born in Mexico, two in Texas and the other six were born in Minnesota (see summary in Table 3).

In the non-Latino focus group (n=22 total; 15 completed data sheets), nine were female, eight were married and four reported working full time. They report living in their current homes for an average of 13.3 years (ranging from six months to 35 years), in Minnesota for an average of 37.8 years (ranging from 3.5 to 73 years), and in the United States for their entire lives. None of the participants indicated that they rent their apartment or house. All of the participants were born in the United States; in fact, all but four were born in Minnesota (see summary in Table 4).

Albert Lea's Latino community is composed of two primary groups: Latinos who have lived in Albert Lea for nearly their entire lives and Latinos who are recent arrivals to the town. This difference has a significant impact on both the experience of these Latinos and the reaction of other residents toward them. Both Latinos and non-Latinos agree that there has been substantial growth in the Latino portion of Albert Lea's population over the past four to five years. Latinos are able to identify one or two agencies and/or individuals that offer assistance to recent immigrants.

Long Prairie

Long Prairie is a town of 3,040 located in Todd County. Todd County is in central Minnesota, about 120 miles northwest of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The largest segment of the non-white population is Latino with recent census data indicating that 285 or 9.4 percent of the population of Long Prairie identifies itself as Latino (see Table 1). These numbers place Long Prairie 26th in Minnesota in raw numbers of Latinos in the community and 31st in percentage of the city's population identifying as Latino. The Latino students in the Long Prairie school district increased from two in 1989 to 72 in 1999, and most of this growth has happened in the past five years. Todd County has established an office to help Latinos acclimate to the area. Major employers include Jennie-O, Long Prairie Packing Company, Dakota Premium Foods and Daybreak Foods.

Three focus groups with a total of 28 participants and 11 individual interviews were conducted in Long Prairie in the fall of 2000 for this research project. Of the two focus groups with members of the Latino community (n=20 total; 17 filled out data sheets), nine were female, ten were married and 12 reported working full time. They report living in their current home for an average of 1.2 years (ranging from three months to four years), in Minnesota for an average of 2.8 years (ranging from three months to eight years), and in the United States for an average of 5.8 years (ranging from three months to 15 years). Sixteen (94%) of the participants reported that they currently rent their apartment or house. Sixteen of the participants were born in Mexico, and one was born in California (see summary in Table 3).

In the non-Latino focus group (n=11), nine were female, nine were married and six reported working full time. They report living in their current home for an average of 8.6 years (ranging from one to 23 years), in Minnesota for an average of

44.5 years (ranging from five years to 71 years), and in the United States for their entire lives. Two (18%) of the participants indicated that they rent their apartment or house. All of the participants were born in the United States; all but one was born in Minnesota (See summary in Table 4).

Owatonna

Owatonna is a town of 22,434 located in Steele County. Steele County is in southeast Minnesota, about 60 miles south of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The largest segment of the non-white population is Latino with recent census data indicating that 967 or 4.3 percent of the population identifying itself as Latino (see Table 1). This means that while Owatonna has Minnesota's 10th largest Latino population, the percentage of the population identifying as Latino barely places it in the top 100 cities in Minnesota. Latinos were likely drawn to the Owatonna area by agricultural jobs; the major employer remains Chiquita's canning factory.

Currently in Owatonna, there are at least three Latino-owned businesses, one Latino-run organization (Centro Campesino), and Latino professionals who are employed as workforce center personnel and county service personnel. During the 1989-1990 school year, there were already 63 Latino students in the Owatonna school district. In the 1999-2000 academic year, that number rose to 198.

Owatonna continues to experience a migrant worker stream during the summer and fall of each year. This is an important characteristic of the community and influences the entire community. It seems that the established Latinos in Owatonna are well accepted and have integrated themselves into an acknowledged "tight-knit" community. Some of these families have been in town for 15 to 20 years and are well known by many community leaders. Non-Latino community leaders see these established Latino families as "bridge builders" or "ambassadors" in town. There is an established Cultural Diversity Group that meets to discuss and implement ideas to embrace the diversity existing in Owatonna.

Three focus groups (with a total of 32 participants) and 12 individual interviews were conducted in Owatonna in fall 2000 for this research project. Of the two focus groups with members of the Latino community (n=28), 19 were female, 19 were married and 22 reported working full time. One of these focus groups had participants who were all migrant agricultural workers. They do not identify Owatonna or Minnesota as "home," and thus our questions regarding amount of time they have lived in their home or in Minnesota were not relevant to them or their experience. Their experiences while in Minnesota are, however, completely relevant to this report, and thus are included wherever possible (see summary in Table 3).

Participants in the non-migrant Latino focus group report living in their current home for an average of four years (ranging from six months to 35 years), and in Minnesota for an average of 6.1 years (ranging from six months to 35 years). All

participants reported living in the United States for an average of 15.2 years (ranging from nine months to 57 years). Sixty percent of the participants reported that they currently rent their apartment or house. An additional 33 percent of the participants in the migrant worker group indicated that the neither rent nor own a home — most likely they live in company-sponsored housing. Twenty-seven of the participants were born in Mexico; two were born in Texas, and one was born in Nebraska.

In the Non-Latino focus group (n=4), three were female, four were married and three reported working full time. They report living in their current home for an average of 21.5 years (ranging from three to 31 years), in Minnesota for an average of 40.7 years (ranging from 33 years to 56 years), and in the United States for their entire lives. None of the participants rent their apartment or house. All of the participants were born in the United States, and all but one were born in Minnesota (see summary in Table 4).

Pelican Rapids

Pelican Rapids is a town of 2,374 located in Otter Tail County. Otter Tail County is in west central Minnesota, about 200 miles northwest of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The largest segment of the non-white population is Latino, with recent census data indicating that 465 or 19.6 percent of the population of Pelican Rapids identifying itself as Latino (see Table 1). This means that Pelican Rapids has the 18th largest Latino population in Minnesota and ranks fourth in terms of the percentage of its population identifying as Latino. Most likely, the Latino community settled here from an agricultural (sugar beets) migrant worker stream. The major employer in the area now is West Central Turkeys (meat processing). School district data indicates that the last 10 years have contained significant change for this community. In the 1989-1990 school year, there were 22 Latino students in the Pelican Rapids school district. In 1999-2000, that number rose to 191. The city is currently in the process of building a Multicultural Center/Library.

Three focus groups with a total of 25 participants and 11 individual interviews were conducted in Pelican Rapids in fall 2000 for this research project. Of the two focus groups with members of the Latino community (n=18), six reported being female, eight reported being married, and seven reported working full time (seven failed to fill out these sections of the questionnaire). They reported living in their current homes for an average of 3.9 years (ranging from three months to seven years), in Minnesota for an average of 5.1 years (ranging from two months to nine years), and in the United States for an average of 12.4 years (ranging from three months to 30 years). None of the participants reported that they currently rent their apartment or house (five failed to answer this question correctly). All eighteen of the participants were born in Mexico (see summary in Table 3).

In the non-Latino focus group (n=8), six were female, six were married and five reported working full time. They reported living in their current homes for an average of 17 years (ranging from one to 28 years), in Minnesota for an average of 38.7 years (ranging from 10 to 75 years), and all but one participant had lived in the United States for their entire lives. Two (18%) of the participants indicated that they rent their apartment or house. Seven of the participants were born in the United States, and one was born in the Netherlands (see summary in Table 4).

St. James

St. James is a town of 4,695 located in Watonwan County. Watonwan County is in southwest Minnesota, about 120 miles southwest of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The largest segment of the non-white population is Latino with recent census data indicating that 1,116 or 23.8 percent of the population of St. James identifies itself as Latino (see Table 1). These numbers mean that St. James ranks eighth in Minnesota for raw number of Latinos residing in town, and it has the largest percentage of Latinos per population in the state. Latinos were likely drawn to the area by word of mouth regarding work opportunities in the meat processing plants and in seasonal farm work (cucumbers and peas).

While there are two Latino-owned businesses in town, there are few services specifically for Latinos, especially considering the number and concentration of Latinos in the area. The University of Minnesota Extension Service and the Community Connectors group appear to be providing some support for positive community growth. For example, a Multicultural Center/Library has been funded and is being developed in town. The major employers of Latinos include Swift, Tony Downs, and a poultry-processing plant in Butterfield, five miles outside of St. James. School district data indicates that St. James' Latino community has been solidly in place for about 15 years: in the 1989-1990 school year there were 90 Latino students in the district. In 1999-2000, that number rose to 269.

St. James' Latino community is composed of two primary groups: Latinos whose families have lived in the St. James area since the 1950s and Latinos who are relatively recent arrivals to the town. This difference has a significant impact on both the experience of these Latinos and the reaction of other residents toward them. Both Latinos and non-Latinos agree that there has been substantial growth in the Latino portion of St. James' population over the past eight to ten years. Latinos are establishing businesses and purchasing homes in town. Latinos are able to identify one or two agencies or individuals that offer assistance to recent immigrants.

Three focus groups, with a total of 27 participants, and 10 individual interviews were conducted in St. James in fall 2000 for this research project. Of the participants of focus groups who were members of the Latino community (n=17), 12 were female, eight were married and nine reported working full time. Of the

remaining participants, three said that they were retired and three said that they worked at home. They reported living in their current homes for an average of eight years (ranging from one year to 23 years), in Minnesota for an average of 10.5 years (ranging from two years to 23 years), and in the United States for an average of 23 years (ranging from two years to 58 years). Five (29%) of the participants reported that they currently rent their apartment or house. Eight of the participants were born in Mexico, two were born in El Salvador, one was born in Guatemala and six were born in the United States (four in Texas, one in Idaho and one in Iowa) (see summary in Table 3).

In the Non-Latino focus group (n=10), seven were female, seven were married and five reported working full time. They report living in their current home for an average of 17.6 years (ranging from one to 48 years), in Minnesota for an average of 44.1 (ranging from 20 years to 62 years), and in the United States for their entire lives. Two (20%) of the participants indicated that they rent their apartment or house. All of the participants were born in the United States, and all but three were born in Minnesota (see summary in Table 4).

Willmar

Willmar is a town of 18,351 located in Kandiyohi County. Kandiyohi County is in southwest Minnesota, about 100 miles southwest of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The largest segment of the non-white population is Latino; recent census data indicates that 2,911 or 15.9% of the population of Willmar identifies itself as Latino (see Table 1). This is the largest number of Latinos in any city in Minnesota after Minneapolis and St. Paul. What originally drew Latinos to this part of state was most likely the agricultural base. While there is still a sizeable agricultural migrant population that works mostly in harvesting beets, Jennie-O (a meat processing plant) is the major employer.

There are a few Hispanic-run organizations in town (Hispanos en Minnesota, GED on TV, Eden Children's project), and the city has at least one Hispanic-owned business. There are also professional Latinos working in community agencies, such as chemical dependency, victim services, general advocacy, and workforce centers. The Latino community has been a significant presence in Willmar for at least 20 years, and the school district's data also reflects the growth in recent years. In the 1989-1990 school year, there were 373 Latino students in the Willmar school district. In 1999-2000, the number was 840.

Three focus groups, with a total of 25 participants, and nine individual interviews were conducted in Willmar in the fall of 2000 for this research project. Of the two focus groups with members of the Latino community (n=16), seven were female, 11 were married and 14 reported working full time. They report living in their current home for an average of 5.6 years (ranging from 15 months to 24 years),

in Minnesota for an average of 11.1 years (ranging from three years to 24 years), and in the United States for an average of 17.9 years (ranging from five to 30 years). Five (31%) of the participants reported that they currently rent their apartment or house. Eight of the participants were born in Mexico; three were born in Guatemala, one was born in El Salvador, three were born in Texas, and one was born in Minnesota (see summary in Table 3).

In the non-Latino focus group (n=9), five were female, six were married and six reported working full time. They report living in their current home for an average of 15.2 years (ranging from three to 40 years), in Minnesota for an average of 41.9 years (ranging from 25 years to 66 years), and in the United States for their entire lives. Two (18%) of the participants indicated that they rent their apartment or house. All of the participants were born in the United States, and all but three were born in Minnesota (see summary in Table 4).

Worthington

Worthington is a town of 11,283 located in Nobles County. Nobles County is in southwest Minnesota, about 180 miles southwest of the Minneapolis/St. Paul area. The largest segment of the non-white population is Latino; recent census data indicates 2,175 or 19.3 percent of the population of Worthington identifies itself as Latino (see Table 1). This number places Worthington third in Minnesota in terms of number of Latinos in a city and fourth in percentage of the city's population. Latinos were likely drawn to the area by word of mouth regarding jobs at the meat processing plants.

There are about three Hispanic-owned businesses in town, and professional Latinos work in community agencies such as Extension Services, Community Connectors, victim services, and general advocacy. The major employer remains the Swift meat processing plant. In the 1989-1990 school year there were 53 Latino students in the Worthington school district. In 1999-2000, there were 455. Clearly the last 10 years have been a time of change for this community.

Two focus groups, with a total of 15 participants, and 12 individual interviews were conducted in Worthington in the fall of 2000 for this research project. In the focus group with members of the Latino community (n= 8), five were female, five were married and three reported working full time, two said they worked half time, and the other three reported either working at home or having two jobs. They report living in their current homes for an average of 6.7 years (ranging from one month to 17 years), in Minnesota for an average of 7.1 years (ranging from three months to 19 years), and in the United States for an average of 23.75 years (ranging from three months to 44 years). Six (75%) of the participants reported that they currently rent their apartment or house. Four of the participants were born in Mexico, and four were born in the United States (see summary in Table 3).

In the non-Latino focus group (n=7), four were female, six were married and three reported working full time. They report living in their current homes for an average of 15.5 years (ranging from six months to 40 years), and in Minnesota for an average of 23.5 years (ranging from six months to 70 years). Four individuals in the group (57%) indicated that they had lived in the United States their entire lives, one lived outside the U.S. for five years and two others reported an average of 2.75 years in the United States. Two of the participants (28%) indicated that they rent their apartment or house. Five of the participants were born in the United States, and two were born outside of this country (see summary in Table 4).

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